

straightforward

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Four years of the pradhan sevak

In his fifth year, Modi must work towards the completion of all the missions he has undertaken

Let me remind you of a moment four years ago, when Narendra Modi reached Parliament House for the first time as prime minister. He knelt and put his forehead to the ground before walking up the stairs to the highest decision-making institution in Indian democracy. The politician from Gujarat was reinventing for a new avatar. Now that his government is entering its fifth year, it won't be out of place to ask: How successful has he been?

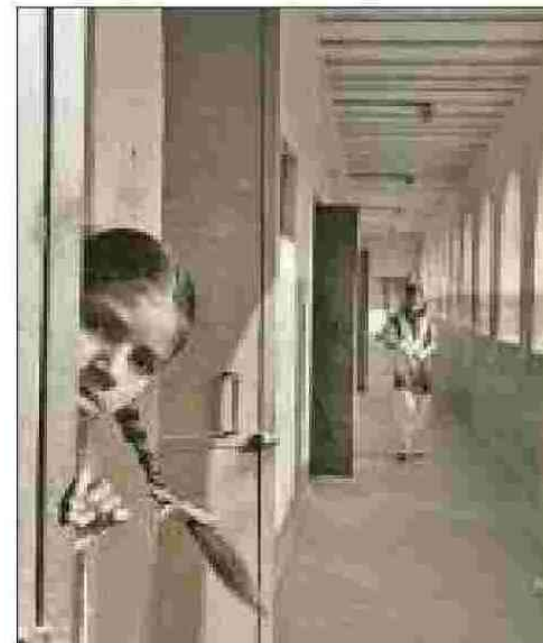
In democracies such assessments are made on the basis of victories and defeats. During Modi's reign, 450 million people have exercised their franchise across 22 states. If you leave out Delhi, Bihar, Kerala, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Punjab and Karnataka, the BJP has been able to form a government in each of the other states. Significantly, the BJP formed a government in Goa, Manipur, Meghalaya and Nagaland, even when it didn't get a majority. The Opposition alleges that with the objective to achieve power at any cost, the BJP doesn't hesitate to misuse government machinery. During this period, other allegations were levelled about putting pressure on the judiciary and the media.

Even as the Narendra Modi political juggernaut was hurtling ahead, a heap of allegations against him was also moving alongside.

In the drum-house of Indian politics, such discordant noises are commonplace. Still, at the same time, some sayings also ring true: the winner takes all and the vanquished should just seek divine intervention. Let us consider the Karnataka assembly elections.

Newly-appointed Congress president Rahul Gandhi and his commander Siddaramaiah had adopted the policy of tit-for-tat on the campaign trail. Till May 1, the Congress had an edge, analysts felt. This was the time when the Janata Dal (Secular) was being perceived as a vote-burglar. Between May 2 and May 10, Modi held 21 public meetings in Karnataka. With 104 seats, the BJP emerged as the party number one. The magic number for government-formation, 112 seats, eluded it. Still conditioned by habit, the BJP formed a government. If it had desisted from this, it would have gone into battle in 2019 with the backing of a moral victory.

In the history of Indian politics, Modi enjoys a unique place and his personality has always sparked a debate. His political statements might have invited criticism from a certain section of society, but if you look at the politics of the last four years, he has managed to stay one step ahead. For instance, after winning the Uttar Pradesh assembly elections, speaking at the BJP headquarters, he said that the Opposition complained about why he



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worked so hard. After the Tripura victory, just before he was about to speak, he heard the azaan (call of prayer). Showing that he respected the sanctity of the prayer, Modi kept silent till it ended. Don't you feel that through his address to party workers, Modi was expressing his work ethic and decorum? That's why, despite not fulfilling his election promises, he continues to enjoy the trust of the ordinary Indian. He has been able to convince the marginalised that he is making an honest effort to dispense what's due to them.

Armed with facts, even if the Opposition

alleges that demonetisation, GST and the bank crisis are Modi's failures, it hasn't affected his popularity.

He is often compared to Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi. But they had the added attraction of dynasty. Opposed to this, Modi has reached extraordinary heights coming from a humble background. He knows mere political jugglery isn't enough to stay at the top. That's why he has chosen to focus on subjects such as toilets, river cleaning and the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao scheme. All these missions haven't yet achieved half their targets, but they've left a positive impression on the people. So you get news from remote villages that the daughter of an underprivileged family refused to get married since the groom's family didn't have a toilet at home.

What's the biggest challenge before Modi, about to complete four years in the power corridors of New Delhi? Public sentiments are like the wind which can suddenly change direction. Did anyone imagine that Raj Narain would defeat Indira Gandhi from Rae Bareilly? To maintain political success you need to strike a balance with societal objectives. Indira Gandhi failed to realise this. In his fifth year, the prime minister will also have to exert all his energy towards completion of all the missions he has undertaken.

This is the political condition that he needs to meet to bridge the gap between being a successful prime minister and true pradhan sevak (principal servant).

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